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Muhammad-Currency

MUHAMMAD SAYS MONEY MEANT FOR PROPERTY PURCHASE

SHAH ALAM, Dec 30 (Bernama) -- Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Muhamad Taib said today the equivalent of RM2.5 million in cash that he failed to declare before leaving Australia was entrusted to him by his brothers for a property purchase transaction in Brisbane's Gold Coast.

Muhammad said he had to bring back the money to Malaysia because two of his brothers could not be present for the sale and purchase agreement to be signed.

He also said he was not aware of the Australian law requiring him to declare the money.

"I did not realise that I had to declare the cash to be taken out of Australia," he told a news conference here. This is his first public statement on the matter since he was charged with trying to take the money out of the Brisbane airport on Dec 22 without approval.

According to Muhammad, he was carrying one million Singapore dollars and RM700,000 in Malaysian currency.

Under Australian law, people leaving the country must declare and justify any amount worth over A\$5,000, in whatever currency. -- MORE

Muhammad said he and his younger brother, Haji Hassan, had inspected the property and asked a lawyer to draw up the sale and purchase agreement.

"However, because Datuk Othman (his elder brother) and Datuk Raduan (younger brother) could not be present, we were given one month to execute the agreement and to settle the payment.

"Therefore, we (Muhammad and Hassan) agreed that the money be taken back to Malaysia and we will settle the question of payment for the property within the one-month period," he said at the news conference which was attended by his wife Puan Sri Asbi Rohani Asnan.

Muhammad said that on Dec 22, before boarding a flight to New Zealand to continue his vacation, he was questioned by Australian authorities at the Brisbane International Airport for carrying the undeclared money.

Muhammad was then with his family as well as his younger brother Hasbullah and his family.

"When I explained to the authorities at the Brisbane Airport, I showed them documents on the sale and purchase agreement for the property," he said.

He said he did not feel guilty over the affair and if at all a wrong had been done, it was a technical offence which was committed unintentionally.

Muhammad looked cheerful but parried many questions by saying "that I will answer in court".

He said the Prime Minister had approved his vacation in Australia and New Zealand from Dec 16 to 31. Muhammad said his family and that of Hasbullah had joined Hassan's family who were already in Australia.

He said apart from going for a holiday, his trip was also to finalise the property deal which Othman, Raduan and Hassan had long decided on.

"Since Othman and Raduan could not go to Australia because of their children's weddings, Raduan, who was entrusted to handle the property purchase, handed over their money to be taken to Australia for buying the property," he said.

"I carried a small amount of my own money," he said, adding that his family proceeded to New Zealand for the vacation when he was facing the court case in Brisbane. He joined them after he was charged and released on

bail on Dec 23.

"This time I went on the vacation without any of my officials. Because of this, all arrangements, including the flights, were made by me," he said.

This and the fact that many family members went on the holiday made the arrangements somewhat improperly organised, he said.

He thanked the Australian authorities for treating him "quite well" during questioning although he did not officially report his presence in the country to the Malaysian High Commission since he was on a private visit.

Muhammad said he personally submitted a full report on the matter to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Saturday and to the Sultan of Selangor yesterday.

Asked why he did not meet the press earlier when he had returned on Saturday, Muhammad said it was only proper for him to explain the matter to the Prime Minister and Sultan first.

Muhammad said he and his brothers had plans to send their children to study in Australia and this was why they decided to buy a property for their use rather than renting from others.

"My brothers can well afford it...one of them is the chairman of a listed company," he said.

He also said he would answer in court when asked on the price of the intended property purchase or whether he had notified Bank Negara of the money he was carrying.

At the news conference, Muhammad held up three copies of the sale and purchase agreement said to bear the names of Othman, Raduan and Hassan and told reporters they could inspect them if they wished.

Muhammad said he was shocked by the whole affair and he would have opened an account in Australia to bank in the money if he knew it was going to cause problems.

"That was not my money. When the deal did not go through, I had to bring it back and return the money, and after they have signed the sale and purchase agreement, they can send it by courier and make the payment," he said.

Muhammad, who has to appear in court in Australia again on March 21, said he would return to work as scheduled on Jan 2.

Also present at the news conference were Selangor Umno deputy chief Datuk Abu Hassan Omar, state Umno secretary Datuk Onn Ismail, Selangor Umno Youth chief Datuk Abdul Fatah Iskandar and several elected representatives.

Earlier, Muhammad met Selangor Umno liaison committee members for more than an hour at the Umno Building here to brief them on the case. --

BERNAMA

MNY YBY